



NEWS RELEASE

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Department of Health Reports that Cases of Whooping Cough Have More Than Doubled in North Dakota in 2012

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health today reported that the number of pertussis (whooping cough) cases in the state is more than double of what was reported last year. As a result, the Department of Health is urging parents and caregivers to make sure their children and themselves are vaccinated, according to Molly Howell, Immunization Program manager with the North Dakota Department of Health.

As of Oct. 30, 2012, 179 cases of pertussis have been reported in North Dakota. Seven of these cases have been hospitalized. Minnesota and South Dakota also are experiencing increased cases. The number of pertussis cases usually peaks every three to five years. The most notable peak in North Dakota was in 2004, when 757 cases were reported. North Dakota saw 30 cases in 2009, 58 cases in 2010 and 70 cases in 2011.

Pertussis is a contagious disease that lasts for many weeks or months and can cause severe coughing with a “whooping” sound or coughing that leads to vomiting. The disease can be life-threatening for infants and is usually spread from adults to infants.

“Pertussis is a disease that can be misleading, because many adults that get it may not experience serious symptoms and may not even feel very sick,” said Molly Howell. “The problem is that infected adults can easily spread the disease to those at high-risk for complications, including infants who are too young to be vaccinated and are at the greatest risk for serious complications.”

Pertussis is often characterized by one or more of the following symptoms:

- Prolonged cough.
- Long spells of coughing with spasms.
- Coughing with a whooping sound.
- Coughing that leads to gagging or vomiting.

People who have any of the above symptoms should contact their health-care provider to be evaluated for whooping cough. Anyone who does not have a cough does not need to be tested.

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Individuals who think they have been exposed to a pertussis case should contact their health-care provider as soon as possible to find out if they should be put on antibiotics.

“Vaccination is an easy way to decrease the likelihood of illness and prevent spread to vulnerable friends and family members,” said Howell. “We encourage everyone to do their part by making sure they are immunized against pertussis.”

Diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis vaccine (DTaP) is recommended for infants at 2, 4, 6 and 15 to 18 months of age, and a booster dose of DTaP should be given at ages 4 to 6. DTaP is required to attend school or day care.

Tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap) is recommended for adolescents ages 11 and 12 and is required for all adolescents entering middle school in North Dakota. Tdap also is recommended for adolescents ages 13 to 18 and all adults. Tdap vaccination is especially important for pregnant women, new parents, siblings, grandparents, child-care providers and health-care providers who have close contact with infants who are at higher risk for severe disease.

The North Dakota Department of Health provides DTaP and Tdap vaccines for children who are uninsured, underinsured, American Indian, and/or have Medicaid. In an effort to protect infants from pertussis, the Department of Health provides Tdap vaccine for uninsured and underinsured adults. Vaccinating adults may reduce the risk of transmission to infants and other susceptible people. Most health insurance covers the cost of vaccines. For more information about where to receive the vaccine, individuals should contact their health-care provider, pharmacist or local public health unit.

More information about pertussis and immunizations is available at www.ndhealth.gov/immunize. For more information, contact Molly Howell, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or toll-free at 800.472.2180.

– 30 –

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